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VII

INDIVIDUAL, FAMILY, AND CLAN

The Members of the Family

THE Orokaiva family is a well-defined group under the immediate authority of the father (*mama*). When (as in the usual instance) it is monogamous, its members live under one roof, and the father and mother clear and cultivate one area of ground, with what help their children may be fit to give them. The family group is therefore in large measure self-supporting and in its internal affairs may also be called independent. The father is master of his wife and children, and if he thinks fit may chastise them without interference from fellow villagers. This is natural enough, as the wife, under normal patrilocal conditions, is a stranger. An instance such as the following is not uncommon. A man named Tiembo set off to the garden accompanied by his wife, his two young daughters, and his dog. The dog set upon a neighbour's pig, and Tiembo, a fond parent but a very excitable man, set upon his wife and elder daughter and thrashed them for not minding the dog. The girl, in a mixture of anger, grief, and indignation (a peculiarly native frame of mind called *sisira*) absented herself from home for two days, and the wife in a huff delayed the cooking of her husband's dinner that evening. But all were very soon reconciled, and the villagers were no more than tickled by the whole affair. Such an instance shows that it behoves the father to practise restraint (which indeed he usually does), but it also illustrates his unquestioned authority over his own family. In this he is backed up by his clan, among whom the wife is virtually a stranger. Indeed, one may doubt whether the severest punishment inflicted upon the stranger woman would arouse anything more than passing disapproval in the clan and village of the husband. On one recent occasion a man of Deunia who had killed his wife in a fit of temper, fled for his life instead of surrendering himself to the village constable. He gave himself up at the first

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opportunity to another constable, a good many miles distant. The reason for his flight was simply that his wife belonged to his own village and to the clan of its constable, so that he feared a too summary punishment. Had this murder occurred before the country was brought under control, one might venture to say that the murderer would have had the actual support of his own clan against that of his wife if a violent retaliation had been attempted. As a rule, however, the Orokaiva is fond of his wife and indulgent to his children. Squabbles do not often occur; too frequent wife-beating is deprecated; and bad temper is regarded as bad conduct.

The Position of Women. The wife and mother is largely occupied with matters of *ménage*, and takes little part in wider social activities. Completely overshadowed by the male she seems very well satisfied with her relative unimportance. A woman takes no initiative in matters which concern the clan as a whole, though, when a number of clans are together at a festival and feeling is perhaps strained, she is sometimes known to blow upon the coals. She has a weapon, the *poreba* or quarterstaff, and in former times would sometimes accompany cannibal raids, acting the part of armour-bearer or assisting in the commissariat.

In private life she is not aggressive, although I may quote a rather striking exception in order to prove the rule. A man named Siavije, having no children by his first wife, married a second, who was compelled, however, to reside in her own village nearby because of the jealousy of the senior wife. Under these circumstances Siavije hardly dared visit his second spouse, and was constantly involved in quarrels with his first. Being an inoffensive man and rather small, he was hardly a match for this large raw-boned woman who was known to worst him on more than one occasion and even to pursue him, crying for help, from end to end of the village.

Polygamy is relatively uncommon. In most of the instances which have come under my notice the wives manage to get on successfully enough with one another, though it is frequently said to be otherwise. I know of one man who 'threw away' his first wife because she could not live in

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provoke an open breach; to gibe at his personal deformity would be the last blow. Baldness, for instance, is regarded as unseemly and ridiculous; but there are no Elishas and no mocking children. It is not of course to be supposed that men of the same group never bandy words, yet rudeness and abuse are always deprecated. Ordinarily the native, who is keenly enough alive to the peculiarities of his fellow, will only refer to them behind his back, and this for no other reason than to avoid doing injury to his feelings. Roughness or rudeness is said to produce in its victim that emotion, or complex of emotions, called *meh*, which we usually and somewhat inadequately translate 'shame', and it is regarded as a serious thing; so much so that if a man commits an unjustifiable affront, not only does the victim suffer, but the culprit's fellows, who feel they share his responsibility, will be positively covered with vicarious *meh*.

We may now turn to the consideration of *practical honesty*. One cannot claim that there is here any high abstract ideal. The native certainly feels no moral obligation to tell the truth in all circumstances—as who should know better than one who spends his time in questioning them? But honesty is a virtue at least in the limited and practical sense of respect for property. Petty thieving is common enough and is treated with a good deal of tolerance, though, considering the absolutely unguarded condition in which property is commonly left, the general honesty of a native village may impress one rather favourably, and would certainly bear comparison with that of a civilized community. It is probably true that as European influence first extends among a primitive people, the decrease in crimes of violence is more than countered by an increase in thieving and other crimes of stealth, and whatever the cause of this latter condition, it implies the decay of one primitive virtue. It is at any rate the common experience of Europeans that the more sophisticated natives are more inclined to steal.

Lastly, we may refer briefly to *married chastity*. Among the Orokaiva a woman is expected to be faithful, even during long absences of her husband. There is no bartering or lending of wives, and the only exception is during the cere-

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APPENDIX

(Extract from a letter from Rev. E. Raff, Vila, New Hebrides)

10th Jan. 1924.

794 On Santo, one of the largest and the most northerly island of this group, we have had an outbreak of insanity very similar to that in the Gulf Division of Papua. Some years ago several 'pro-
[792] phets' arose and caused great unrest among the people prophesying a flood in which only the elect, i.e. their 'paid up' followers, would be saved and promising resurrections and a ship from Sydney filled with rice and trade goods.

A large house was built to receive these goods and on one occasion the people nearly took possession of a recruiting schooner in the belief that their ship had arrived. Every passing sail aroused great excitement and fire-signals from the anxious watchers posted on the beach. Emissaries of the chief prophet travelled far and wide over Santo and enrolled hundreds, perhaps thousands, who paid first pigs and later money, 5*s.* to £1, for the privilege and the promised benefits. In one quarter the plantation boys were convinced of the truth of the prophet's assertions, because, though he had never been to school, he could write 'language belong white man'. In evidence they produced a piece of paper scrawled with unintelligible marks.

794 Some of the natives heard that Ronovuro, the chief prophet, had raised a dead cow and at one of the 'sing sings' (dances) a follower
792 who fell down 'dead' was promptly revived. But the promised
715 resurrections were postponed time and time again, and at last it was given out that the 'whites' who were the cause of most deaths (except old age) on Santo were also preventing the resurrections and the cry became 'Santo for the Santoese' and ideas arose about driving out the whites.

794 Credence was given to this idea by an old story which became
715 very popular. This old story told how, when at last a noted native murderer was done to death, all his victims came to life. The natural deduction was 'Kill the whites who have caused the deaths and the dead shall arise'. About sixteen months ago I was on Santo and things were then in a dangerous condition.

794 The culmination was a tragedy which occurred on the 24th of
715 July of last year. Ronovuro was holding a great 'sing sing' at the conclusion of which the resurrections were to take place.
674 Probably it was decided then that the Europeans were to die. A half-caste visited this 'sing sing' and was recognized by Ronovuro

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as his deceased son. The resurrection bodies were to be white skinned. The half-caste did not appreciate his adoption and took the first opportunity for flight. In the middle of the 'sing sing' Ronovuro's wife died and when all attempts to raise her to life failed, he declared that a planter named Clapcott was the cause and must be killed before she would come to life. Five men were sent to shoot this planter, who was an inoffensive man, deaf and in a very lonely place. He was shot, his body mutilated and parts of it eaten. The sequel to the tragedy was that six men were condemned, three including Ronovuro were executed, three were reprieved, and a number of other natives are in prison for sharing in the loot. There is a good probability that now the ringleader is out of the way the madness will soon disappear.

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241 224 towards the bait, passes the fatal point of weakness, and, as the stick breaks under his weight, falls into the abysm.

241 224 136 A more serious nuisance to the gardener is the flying fox (*dipere*), a very destructive creature whose favourite foods are bananas, papaw, and bread-fruit. In certain parts, their daylight camping grounds, one may see flocks of them hanging in dense clusters from the high branches, or circling slowly round to settle again and renew their slumbers. In the Isivita district may be found a kind of snare for the flying foxes suspended in a high tree. It takes the form of a roughly knitted bag, just large enough to hold a bread-fruit. To this bag are attached a number of running nooses, say six or seven inches long, which form a confused tangle all around it. The bat attacks the bread-fruit in its clumsy fashion; to reach the fruit it can hardly avoid slipping its head into a noose, and then, trying to get clear, hangs itself. Another contrivance, somewhat devilish, was seen at Wasida. The cane palms have trailing branches with cruel recurved thorns which have a way of tearing your shirt or sweeping your hat off as you pass by in the bush. A cluster of these slender trailers is tied in a bunch to a stick, much after the manner of a witch's broom, and the villager stands in the darkness by his banana tree, the witch's broom or *asora* held close to the bunch of fruit. When the flying fox settles, flapping noisily on the bananas, one swift jerk of the *asora* brings him down, with the grappling hooks in the delicate membranes of his wings.

241 223 136 The only bird which does much harm to the natives is the white cockatoo, who plays havoc with young coco-nuts. In some villages long cables of rattan cane are attached to the tops of the coco-nut palms, sometimes with hollow shells of the cycad *Puga* for rattles. Sometimes the native will aim a stone with his sling. But as the cockatoo is a bold bird and the native an easy-going man, the young coco-nuts for the most part continue to be gnawed.

241 674 There is yet another garden pest—the dishonest neigh-

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bour. Theft is not altogether uncommon and in former times may have led to serious reprisals. An old man tells how he found a woman stealing his taro, and immediately dealt her a blow on the back with his pineapple club, with corrective but happily not fatal results. So also we find tales of ravaged gardens, tale-bearing, accusations, and the indeterminate duels in which the Orokaiva rejoices to find a vent for his anger. As prevention is better than cure, however, the garden is often guarded by some taboo sign—a few wisps of grass laid across the path, a thin tape of bark tied to sticks and encircling the garden, or some coco-nut leaflets knotted about the trunk of the palm. These are nearly always respected, partly through mere law-abidingness, partly because of the veiled threat of sorcery which they imply.

Besides these frail but effective safeguards, the gardener used occasionally to resort to practical measures more after the manner of spring-guns and man-traps. The *oivo* is a miniature pitfall, lined with sharp little spikes, which, I was assured, are sometimes tipped with *inja*, or sorcerer's medicine. Concealed with leaves they were placed in gardens, or more usually on tracks leading into the village, so that any sorcerer who came prowling after dark might make a false step and betray his presence by a yell. Nowadays, I am told, the practice has been abandoned, and the only cases in which I heard of the *oivo*'s actual effectiveness were those in which the wrong man had been caught—perhaps naturally, as a guilty trespasser would lie low and conceal his injuries. A certain well-known character, ex-Corporal Bia, at the Mambare mouth, went, as he says, to inspect his brother's pineapples; but the inspection was cut short, just at the stage, perhaps when the sampling might have begun, by a step into the *oivo*.

(*e*) *Harvesting, Storing, &c.* The taro is planted from time to time, and used as it matures. Almost daily the wife will go out to her garden, do a little weeding, and fill her *eti*, or string bag, with freshly pulled taro. If she